

Five cents is the true name for the nickel

By Roger Boye

Here are answers to more questions from Chicago Tribune readers.

Q—In 1983 I paid \$410 for a one-ounce gold medallion that shows Robert Frost and quotes lines from one of his poems. Does the federal government still make such items? How much is my medal worth today?

J. N., South Holland

A—Between 1980 and 1984 Uncle Sam produced 10 types of gold medallions for sale to bullion investors. Your item—one of the most popular of the series—retails today for the value of the gold (about \$385 a troy ounce in mid-February).

Q—Where can I get information about ordering coin sets from Canada and England?

H. J., Chicago

A—Write to the Royal Canadian Mint, P.O. Box 457, Station A, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1N 8V5, and to the British Royal Mint, P.O. Box 2570, Woodside, N.Y. 11377. The British mint also has a toll-free telephone number, (800) 221-1215.

Q—Why does the government use “five cents” on nickels rather than “one nickel”? Dimes are called “one dime.”

F. D., Glen Ellyn

A—The coinage act of 1792 established the dime (then spelled “disme”) as an official monetary unit and also authorized production of a silver half-dime worth one-twentieth of a dollar. In 1866 officials introduced a five-cent coin made of nickel and copper, which eventually replaced the half dime. Consumers dubbed the new coin a “nickel,” but the term still has no official status in U. S. coinage laws.

Q—How can I identify a “wheat penny”? How much are such coins worth?

T. R., Skokie

A—Check the “tails sides” of your Lincoln cents. Newer coins depict the Lincoln Memorial, which was added in 1959 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Lincoln’s birth. Lincolns produced between 1909 and 1958 feature two stylized ears of durum wheat. The “collector value” of a wheat cent depends on its date, mint mark and condition. Most worn pennies from the 1940s and 1950s retail for five cents or less and wholesale